THE ARTIST'S MOST IMPORTANT BOOK

Weber, Max.

PRIMITIVES: Poems and Woodcuts.

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The first book of the Spiral Press as well as Weber's first illustrated book.

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Do Jeanette Gelz
with best regards from
Max Weber

Apart. Nice A.M.
Dec 31. 1929

PRIMITIVES

POEMS AND WOODCUTS

BY MAX WEBER

THE SPIRAL PRESS NEW YORK

1926

INTRODUCTION

Max Weber is a veritable primitive. He has the child-mind, the Earth-mind, a mind innocent of the stupefying complications and complexities of civilization. His soul is always in the attitude of wonder, awe and worship. He sees the eternal through all time-forms. He is kin to William Blake and Henri Rousseau. He stammers out his wonder before the universe and the art of man.

His emotions are his thoughts. He is a curious reversion to beginnings. In his art, in his poetry he has pursued his private vision with a sublime disregard of opinion, "movements" or "fashions." He is a Holy Innocent of Art.

These poems and wood-cuts are therefore, to me at least, unique in that they reveal a soul. The poems have a strange, infantile, untutored flavor. They have instantaneity and spontaneity. They record the influence of exotic gods in a free verse that takes no thought of syntax or the formal music of poets. They haunt me with their imperfections as much as they do with their perfections—like Walt Whitman. Their total disregard of my poetic preconceptions captivated me. Those that I lay aside with misgivings I take up again and again, finding at last in their crude simplicity the very essence of First Speech.

"Chac-Mool of Chichen-Itza" is a great poem, majestic, serene, cosmic. And it is so with "Apollo" who walks "into yet unlived time," who was "created to create." "To a Kuan-Yin" is superb—"the hum of eternal silence veils her" and "her eyes see and lift invisible horizons."

Max Weber is a reaction against intellectualism. He is the uncorrupted baby-stare before the incarnations of the soul of man in art.

BENJAMIN DE CASSERES

THE POEMS

BAMPENSE KASAI
CONGO FORM
TO XOCHIPILLI, LORD OF FLOWERS
SHAKA
TO BUDDHA
CHAC-MOOL OF CHICHEN-ITZA
WOMAN
THE TOTEM POLE MAN
A LITTLE LION
TO A KUAN-YIN
FORM
A HAND FROM SIAM
RACES AND STONE
PERFECTION-GREEK
APOLLO
FIGURES OF THOLUS

BAMPENSE KASAI

Mask Bampense Kasai,
Crudely shaped and moulded art thou,
In weighty varied solid frightful form,
Through thy virility brutality and blackness,
I gain insight subtle and refined.
Then 'tis true Kasai that the sculptor in thy making
Was not the jungle savage,
But high spirited and living soul.
In carving thy features Bampense Kasai,
In the crudest geometric form,
Thy savage maker makes an art
At once untrifling big and powerful.
Surely not ignorance but fear and love and spirit high,
Made him make you Bampense Kasai.

CONGO FORM

Oh Kasains,
Whereof didst thou know such forms to hew,—
Forms that feed the tactile eye,
Forms that shake the silence, and spread the space,
Forms that stir and pierce the light?
No Greek perfection pale,
Nor aesthetics frail!
Here, no!
None but ever deepening profundo voices,
Only those the soul can hear.
The laws eternal here dwell,
A black mask, bearded and tattooed is eternal here.
It speaks of life,
It smells of earth,
It oozes blood,
And vests power into power.
Noses here smell,
And eyes look.
Lips kiss,
Breasts nurse,
And wombs are pregnant.

Expression here weaves on,—meaning.
And here art lives,
Art eternal.
Behind these masks, hearts beat awe, fire, and fear.
Behind these feet is time footprinted on earth
Pressed by balance and weight,
And into infinity rythmed.
Here lives art,
Art alone,—
Companioned by its own multiple form.

TO XOCHIPILLI, LORD OF FLOWERS

Thou art a flower, tender of attitude yet virile of form,
Oh, lord of flowers, Xochipilli!
Of clay art thou made;
But thy maker thee embodied
With spirit vibrating and filling.
Thou starest with an all-seeing, all-penetrating eye.
Thou fillest boundless space,
Watcher of endless time,
Speaker of the universal tongue.
Thou art more living than
Ten thousand others made of flesh.
'Tis because of thy maker
That thou art thus.

SHAKA

Shaka,—
Though headless thou art,
Thine eyes I see.
They speak to me,
They know me.
So many selves in me thine eyes see
As eyes in thee I see.
All eyes sit in thee, Shaka,
And all thine eyes see me.
Though thou of stone, Shaka,
I of breath,—
Thy spirit I inhale,
In thine eyes I am.
Time—
Infinity and its echoes,
Between you and me come and go,
Ages to circum-make.

TO BUDDHA

Upon you I look,
And my own voice in your thought I hear.
You and I are here,—
And alone no more I am.
Your silence, silence wakes,—
And awakened to new being I am,
Here, here with you, Buddha, I am.

CHAC-MOOL OF CHICHEN-ITZA

Chac-Mool of Chichen-Itza,
So art thou imbued with energy of vision
That thy stare into the future with unequalled velocity
Leaves all behind thee, as thou hast and always wilt.
Thou wert made once so, to witness all that passes and
all that shall pass.
Thy time endless, one breath of thine, the intervals
between the opening and closing of thine eyelids
Is a great part of eternity.
Thy weight and power was made to endure and bear,
Thou wilt stand the fiercest storm, heat, cold,
Thou wilt suffer and conquer change, time, emotion, sorrow,
All will pass and come again to go again, endlessly thus;
But thou art eternal, thou art the sign of eternity.
Thou wilt see all and know all always.
The cup thou holdest so firmly in thy powerful and
untrembling hands,
Shall forever receive the raindrops from gentlest shower
to the waters of the maddest cloudburst.
Again to evaporate and to rise from thy cup
Again to fall and to be received by thee.

Forever thou watchest, listenest, to the eternal truth,
Thou art agent and medium of the infinity of all things.
Would I were with thee, if I but could and knew how,
Even though of clay thou art made,
Thou knowest more, thou feelest more, thou seest more, thou rememberest more, thou art more.
Oh my brother in eternity, Chac-Mool of Chichen-Itza.
Would that I could but hear thine unuttered speech in silence and heavenly mood,
I feel our minds greet and kiss each other.
A liquid sweetness of soul and peace,
Flows living from me to thee and from thee to me.
What wisdom thou hast, what power,
Thy stern lips of thy firm mouth have spoken, do speak, and will forever speak.
Thy nostrils ever will breathe of endless time and space,
Thy pulse ever will mark time,
Thy shoulders' strength I know can bear the weight of all time,
Thy legs and knees so mighty can ever span the earth,
And bend and give rhythm to endless motion.

So fixed art thy feet to earth,
That nothing can shake thee.
Oh Chac-Mool of Chichen-Itza,
Thou of all the earth.
Thou art composite of all, in all, to all, endless.
I doubt not thy being, and doubt not my being,
I am here with thee always, and always was and always will be.
I hear thee, I understand thee, doubt not, doubt not.
Of flesh I am made, and mortal I am,
Thou shalt remain to tell that I have been.
Thou art monumental, thou art colossal, thou art eternal.

WOMAN

Ah Woman,
Gesture-Woman,
Touch-Woman,
Sight-Woman.
Bow, Woman,
Humble Woman,
God's life you mother.
Walk Woman,—
At your heels flowers spring,
The breezes music as you sway.
In your eyes the light of heaven mirrors.
On thy lips the mornings dew,
Your breath is milk-fragrant,
Your voice is resonant with inherent birth.
In you child-ages speak.
Love, Woman,
Love,—
Kiss, Woman,
Kiss,—
Mother, Woman,—
Mother.

THE TOTEM POLE MAN

He has legs,
He has a belly,
He has arms,
He stands and breathes and looks,
With his eyes, the vagaries out of space he frights away.

A LITTLE LION

A Chinese sculptor of China old
A little lion in marble carved.
The lion lay elliptic-curved,
Touching his nose with the end of his tail.
I well infer that the sculptor meant
The circuit of conciousness to embody in stone.

TO A KUAN-YIN

On her lips and brow infinity is woven,
On her forehead silver moons glide,
The hum of eternal silence veils her,
Crowned is she by rainbows of light,
On her cushion-cheeks peace sleeps and doubt melts.
In her halo sorrows vanish,
Her eyes see and lift invisible horizons,
Oh, Art,—flower, Mother of Eternity.

FORM

In space that is knit to time,
And hovering matter that in both inheres,
Infinite form for revelation calls.
In the embryon of conception and crave,
Passion enblazed, ecstasy sublime,
Form of beauty and power evoke.
In abysmal rolling darkness and depth,
Atoms in timeless chaos waft and wait
Upon visible planets to dwell,—
The light of suns to see,
And vaulted dimensions to embed.
The tactile touch and hewing hand,
Fired and pulst by heat and blood from the heart,
Spheric, comic, cubic entity and rhythm mould.
Horizons expand,
Heavens unfold,
Light beams,
And the senses the soul enflame
Into boundless radiant firmaments to rise.

A HAND FROM SIAM

A hand like a palm-leaf lies,
Its life-lines are like veins.
Its gesture calms to peace,
The tired head it pillows.
Ah what rest can here be found,
And what warmth!
What a pillow,—soft as down,
A portrait is this hand—
The face of the heart,
Of grace and pathos too.
In this hand the whole woman I see,
A mother of races she must have been.
What caresses of love gave this hand,
On child's cheek and adult's too.
What lakes of tears did it hold,
What paths did it indicate,
What consent and approval,
What gesture of grace and accent to word!
What said this hand that no lips could say,
What music has it timed,
What beats of the heart,
And what impulse too!

RACES AND STONE

Of sacred stone, wood, clay and bronze,
Are forms wrought mighty and chaste
Art's symbols of races and time to hold.
Without the carving cutting creating hand
The legacies of races oblivious would be.
Under the domes of art the muses dwell,
And with their respective lyres
Each a different form enchants.
Like prophets with trumpets they herald
The eternal message that only in art is enwombed.

In spirit accordant and imbibing mood I must be
A Kuan-Yin in stone of china old to see
That Woman in all its maternal splendor is before me.
A Lakshmi in bronze from ancient India
Is a goddess veiled in folds of mystic mellowed beauty.
A tiny tender Tanagra to greet—
A figurine most subtle and reticent of gesture and grace,—
Alert, open, receptive I must be.
Masks from Borneo, Kamerun, Ak-Kapana I behold,
Passion, ecstasy, rage, my spirits enflame.
A Buddha with breath suspended and pulse withheld,

As he caresses horizons with twilit smiles of wisdom,—
As he reigns with inner vision in auras transcendent,
And ordains planetary moments into eternities,
Is to glimpse into infinite presence of lyric layers of light.
Oh Art Eternal,—God's own legacy supernal.

PERFECTION-GREEK

On the Acropolis at Athens in Greece
Pericles and Phidias the Parthenon built,—
The symbol and pinnacle of Greek beauty and light.
To-day, now, ruined and bewailed
Lies the Acropolis of old.
Endless time it waits,
Again concretely answered to be
With forms less perfect, less final,
Perfection endless to make.
For, alas,
The cold marble colder still became,
In the hands of the all too perfect Greek.

APOLLO

Your legs are firm, and noble is your head,
Alert you stand and prepared,
To walk into yet unlived time.
You, Apollo,—
You were created to create.
Upon you I gaze,
And the figure of eternity I see.
Your silence is meditation,
But you must speak.
Your smile is hope,
In your eyes is the warmth and color of the south.
My senses wider you open,
And new rythms, visions and symbols I conceive.
Your shoulders buttress the beams of time,
And all joy and sorrow your pectorals bear.
The hollows and fullnesses of your body,
Are like the valleys and hills of the earth.
Vase-shaped are your calves,
In your beauty and austerity lies your strength.
Straight and upward you grew like a plant,
A human plant, indeed, you are.

FIGURES OF THOLUS

Ye godly headless figures of Greece,
Though thy form is in part destroyed,
Is then thy breath of Athens' days ended?
And art thou scattered and strewn on the tide of time?
Speak, oh ye white shadows of the past,
With limbs and torsos draped in grace,
In serenity and nobility in the kingdom of art.
Oh lyrical, graceful, and excellent forms—
Static in place, and mobile in space,
Silenced and hidden wert thou,
But thou art, as thou hast always been.
Tholus,—
Though thy temples are in part destroyed,
And thy palaces and arenas down-worn by time,—
Space might have frozen about thy forms,
And left us the moulds thy past to rebuild,
And make us part of thee,—Tholus.
Speak thou silent mouths of Greece,
Move thy limbs and heads and torsos superb,
Let us see and here more of your all!
Stir, move, breathe,—

Come out of your time-stilled niche,
Step out of this dust-laden pedimental abode,—
Come to us, walk and mingle with us,—
And show us how to be, what thou hast once been.
Teach us, guide us,—
Tell us, what God of art hast made thee.

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